

The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership

The new EU-Central Asia Strategy defines, for the first time, political guidelines for significantly greater EU commitment in Central Asia (CA). With this strategy, the EU underlines the increasing strategic importance of Central Asia located as it is between Europe, Asia, Russia and South Asia. To support the Strategy, the EU, in the period 2007-2013, will double its financial assistance for CA countries (750 Mio EUR). Additional funding will be provided through bilateral programmes with Member States and cooperation with IFIs. The EU and CA countries will also hold a regular dialogue on a political level, as was the case for the first time in March this year in Astana. The progress made on implementation will be reviewed by the Council in June 2008 and at least every two years thereafter. The EU is committed to opening Commission delegations in all five CA countries.

Bilateral and regional cooperation

The EU Strategy aims at a balanced bilateral and regional approach which addresses the differing needs and performance of every country. The EU will support regional cooperation both among Central Asian States themselves, and between Central Asian States and other regions. The EU will seek constructive dialogue with regional organisations in Central Asia.

Human rights, rule of law, good governance and democratization

A stable political framework and functioning economic structures are dependent on the rule of law, human rights, good governance and transparent, democratic political structures. The EU is willing to engage in human rights dialogues with all Central Asian States. The EU will allocate funds to a "Rule of Law Initiative" and will work together closely with the OSCE and the UN.

Investing in the future: youth and education

The majority of Central Asia's population is under the age of 25. Good education is essential for their future. The EU and Member States will therefore set up a "European Education Initiative" for Central Asia in order to help adapt the education systems of Central Asian States to the needs of the globalised world. The EU will support the development of regional education centres and cooperate closely with the OSCE Academy in Bishkek.

Promotion of economic development, trade and investment

The EU supports the removal of trade barriers between the Central Asian States and will support the WTO accession of the 4 countries which are not yet WTO members. The EU will promote the creation of regulatory and institutional frameworks for an improved business and investment environment and support economic diversification. The expansion of the regional infrastructure in the fields of transport, energy and trade will help to make better use of Central Asia's economic potential, not least through improved regional cooperation.

Strengthening energy and transport links

The EU and CA share a paramount interest in increasing the security of energy supplies as an important aspect of global security. Besides oil, gas and electricity, water management is a crucial aspect of energy policy. Hydro-power production and distribution are crucial to promoting stability and prosperity in Central Asia and beyond. Increasing oil and gas exploitation will contribute to better world market supplies. A market-based approach in transparent, stable and non-discriminatory regulatory frameworks will guarantee best prices and best opportunities for all stakeholders. The EU will engage in a regular, extended dialogue on energy with Central Asian States within the framework of the Baku Initiative. The EU will lend political support and assistance to CA countries in developing a new Caspian Sea-Black Sea-EU energy transport corridor.

Environmental sustainability and water

Fair access to water, forestry management, issues related to the extraction and transport of energy resources as well as vulnerability to climate change are areas where the EU will intensify cooperation with the CA States.

Combating common threats and challenges

Modern border management creating open and secure borders could facilitate trade and interaction in the region and at the same time help combat regional criminal activity, especially the international drug trade and extremism. Migration is one of the major global challenges of the 21st century. The EU will step up its support for the development of modern border management in CA.

Building bridges: inter-cultural dialogue

The diversity of religions and centuries-old traditions of peace and tolerance constitute a valuable heritage in Central Asia. Building on this, the EU will promote dialogue within civil society and respect for freedom of religion.